

Herpetological Philately

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While no match for mammals, fish and especially birds for numbers, amphibians and reptiles have appeared on postage stamps of a large number of countries, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. Reimer (1993) mentioned that till January 1993, approximately 812 stamps on turtles alone have been issued by a total of 172 countries and other stamp-issuing authorities.

Publicity on the plight of the world's sea turtles in the 1970s and 80s saw the issue of stamps on these species by a large number of countries. Sea turtle stamps, as might be expected, are much more commonly issued by island nations. Here is an inventory of sea turtle stamps:

Anguilla (*Chelonia mydas*, *Caretta caretta*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Dermochelys coriacea*), Belize (*Chelonia mydas*, *Caretta caretta* [two, an individual of the saltwater population and one of the freshwater population], *Eretmochelys imbricata*), Cuba (*Lepidochelys kempi*, *Chelonia mydas*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*), Dominica (*Chelonia mydas*), Grand Cayman (*Chelonia mydas*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*), Greece (*Caretta caretta*), Grenada (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Italy (*Dermochelys coriacea*), Malaysia (*Dermochelys coriacea*, *Chelonia mydas*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Lepidochelys olivacea*), Maldives (*Dermochelys coriacea*, *Natator depressa*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Chelonia mydas*, *Caretta caretta*, *Lepidochelys olivacea*), Mozambique (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Nicaragua (*Caretta caretta*), Panama (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), Papua New Guinea (*Natator depressa*, *Chelonia mydas*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Lepidochelys olivacea*, *Caretta caretta*, *Dermochelys coriacea*), Pitcairns (*Chelonia mydas*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, each with and without the map of the Pitcairns), St. Vincent (*Chelonia mydas*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Dermochelys coriacea*, *Caretta caretta*), Solomon Islands (*Dermochelys coriacea*, *Caretta caretta*, *Lepidochelys olivacea*, *Chelonia mydas*), Tonga (*Chelonia mydas*), Tuvalu (*Chelonia mydas*), Vietnam (*Chelonia mydas*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Dermochelys coriacea*), Yugoslavia (*Caretta caretta*).

The poor cousins of sea turtles, freshwater turtles and tortoises, have also been featured on postage stamps brought out by a number of countries:

Afghanistan (*Testudo horsfieldii*), Antigua (*Geochelone carbonaria*), Australia (*Chelodina longicollis*), Belize (*Trachemys decussata*), Botswana (*Geochelone pardalis*), Brazil (*Podocnemis expansa*), Burkina Faso (*Kinixys erosa*), Cambodia or Kampuchea (*Geochelone gigantea*), East Germany (*Emys orbicularis*), Ecuador (*Geochelone gigantea*), Republic of Guinea (*Geochelone gigantea*),

Japan (*Geoemyda japonica*), Kenya (*Malacochersus tornieri*), Laos (*Malaclemys terrapin*), Mali (*Geochelone sulcata*), Papua New Guinea (*Carettochelys insculpta*), Poland (*Emys orbicularis*), Romania (*Testudo graeca*), Surinam (*Rhinoclemmys punctularia*), Vietnam (*Cuora trifasciata*, *Geochelone elegans*, *Platysternon megacephalum*).

Seychelles even produced a stamp showing Father Christmas riding an indeterminate species of turtle.

For some inexplicable reason, crocodile stamps are the rarest. The few countries that have produced stamps of these "ruling reptiles" include Argentina (*Caiman crocodilus*), the former State of North Borneo, now Sabah, east Malaysia (*Crocodylus porosus*), Gambia (*Osteolaemus tetraspis*), Nicaragua (*Crocodylus acutus*), Papua New Guinea (unidentifiable crocs being skinned), Tanzania (*Crocodylus niloticus*) and Australia (a 90-cent stamp of a *Crocodylus johnsoni* in addition to 2-shilling and 2-dollar stamps of the same species in aboriginal art). Cuba produced two, both of *Crocodylus rhombifera*. India, the caretaker of over 400 species of reptiles and 200 amphibians has issued one stamp showing *Gavialis gangeticus* but has no stamps showing any of the other groups of amphibians and reptiles. Her neighbor, Bangladesh, with a much smaller population of the same crocodilian species issued a set of four stamps, showing feeding, resting and basking gharials.

Lizards have appeared on the postage stamps of a far greater number of both temperate and tropical countries. The most commonly seen species is *Iguana iguana*, which has been featured by the British Virgin Islands, Cuba, Nicaragua and St. Lucia; and also by Cambodia, where the species does not occur naturally.

Other iguanid lizard stamps have been brought out by:

Anguilla (*Iguana delicatissima*), Barbados (*Anolis extremus*), British Virgin Islands (*Cyclura pinguis*), Cambodia (*Sauromalus obesus*, *Phrynosoma coronatum*, *Cyclura macleayi*), Cuba (*Anolis allisoni*, *Cyclura nubila*), Dominica (*Anolis carolinensis*), Fiji (*Brachylophus fasciatus*), Monserret (*Anolis lividus*)

A partial list of saurian stamps, arranged by family, follows:

Agamidae: Australia (*Physignathus lesueurii*), Burkina Faso (*Agama stellio*), Cambodia (*Uromastix acanthinurus*), East Germany (*Agama lehmanni*), Indonesia (*Bronchocela jubata*), Vietnam (*Physignathus cocincinus*).

Anguidae: Cambodia (*Ophisaurus apodus*), Romania (*Anguis fragilis*).